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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 001169

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SUBJECT: DAS KROL'S DISCUSSIONS WITH KYRGYZ CIVIL SOCIETY

REF: (A) BISHKEK 1168 (B) BISHKEK 1128 (C) BISHKEK 154

Classified By: Ambassador Tatiana C. Gfoeller, for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The delegation led by Deputy Assistant Secretary George Krol which visited Kyrgyzstan October 26-28 met with civil society, the political opposition, and political analysts at the Ambassador's home. It also visited the southern city of Osh. Over lunch, members of civil society told DAS Krol about the increasing vulnerability of human rights activists and opposition members and criticized U.S. assistance to the Bakiyev regime. At an evening reception, political opposition members echoed these same themes, arguing that the efforts of the U.S. to work with the government were not helpful to them. In Osh, DAS Krol and the delegation visited several U.S.-funded assistance projects and met with local NGO leaders and activists.
END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Deputy Assistant Secretary George Krol, National Security Council Director for Central Asia Kurt Donnelly, Coordinator for Assistance to Central Europe and Eurasia (EUR/ACE) Daniel Rosenblum, and Dean Fischer of EUR/ACE visited Kyrgyzstan October 26-28. Besides meetings with government officials (ref a), the delegation met with political analysts, opposition figures, and civil society activists. The Delegation was accompanied by the Ambassador in all Bishkek meetings, by the DCM in Osh, and by USAID Regional Mission Director for Central Asia Andrew Sisson throughout.

CIVIL SOCIETY CRITICAL OF LACK OF REFORMS

13. (SBU) During a lunch on October 26 hosted by the Ambassador, members of Kyrgyzstan's civil society described a deteriorating human rights situation. Advisor to the Ombudsman, Dmitry Kabak, highlighted the numerous court cases that the rights activists deemed to be spurious and baseless, including the trials in Balykchy (ref d) and Nookat (ref e). Dinara Oshurahunova, head of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, added that Kyrgyz law enforcement agencies presume guilt when arresting anyone on charges of extremism or attempting to overthrow the government, as in the aforementioned cases. She said that the law on terrorism passed last year equips law enforcement agencies with the authority to suppress citizens' rights to free speech and freedom of assembly.

14. (SBU) Asiya Sasykbaeva, head of the advocacy center Interbilim, warned that the list of human rights violations was long and that she was disappointed that she has seen little change in the U.S. government's stance since the last

time she and other activists met with a visiting delegation from Washington. She said that President Bakiyev's ongoing reorganization of government was a move to eliminate checks and balances in an effort to concentrate his power. Sasykbaeva felt that money spent on promoting democracy by the U.S. and the European Union was "lost on an authoritative regime."

15. (SBU) Cholpon Jakupova, director of the Adilet Legal Clinic, said that rights organizations endure constant pressure by the authorities for two reasons: because they speak out against the government and because they work with the U.S. and are seen as spies. Because the U.S. is seen as "providing millions of dollars to support a corrupt regime," Jakupova feared losing her reputation with the public for being a U.S. partner.

DEBATING REFORMS AND U.S. ROLE

16. (C) At a reception at the Ambassador's home, political opposition members discussed with DAS Krol and the Delegation the current political environment and the government reorganization. Some expressed concern that the reorganization gave President Bakiyev too much power over government operations. Other observers opined that Bakiyev already completely controlled the government and these changes were only cosmetic.

17. (C) Temir Sariyev of the Ak Shumkar political party, a frequent critic of the Embassy, noted that U.S. assistance

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through the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, and others was helping local political parties and groups develop and play a role in local politics.

Omurbek Tekebayev of the Ata Meken political party disagreed, stating that U.S. assistance was not helping and that NDI and IRI were not accomplishing their goals in Kyrgyzstan. He added that the political situation had deteriorated significantly since 2005. Several of the guests at the reception reiterated the same theme noting that freedoms and democratic standards in Kyrgyzstan have become more restricted in the past four years and that the Government of Kyrgyzstan does not appear to be making any efforts to improve the situation.

VISIT TO OSH AND U.S. ASSISTANCE PROJECTS

18. (SBU) On October 27, the Delegation visited Osh, viewing several U.S. assistance projects and meeting with civil society. In a lunch meeting civil society leaders focused on the problems of their society, but also on some of its accomplishments. Activists decried what they saw as an increasing level of corruption, an increase in "traditional" values which tend to deprive women of their rights, and serious problems of trafficking in persons. Their focus was more on specific issues and problems, and less on the broader political and human rights situation, compared with their counterparts in Bishkek. One optimistic point which they agreed upon was Kyrgyzstan's progressive legislation on women's rights, including quotas for membership in the Parliament.

19. (SBU) The Delegation visited the principle border crossing between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and viewed the extensive new equipment and facilities the USG has provided to Kyrgyzstan via the Export Control and Border Security (EXBS) program. New facilities include new buildings for screening pedestrians and x-ray equipment for both pedestrians and vehicles. The equipment is brand new and x-ray operators were in Bishkek for training during the visit.

110. (SBU) The Delegation discussed with the border guards and customs officers the operation at the crossing and their

relationship with their counterparts on the Uzbek side of the border. The Kyrgyz officials reported that while truck traffic has remained constant, the number of pedestrians crossing the border is still about one-tenth what it was before the 2005 Andijon events. Strict Uzbek restrictions on movement were the cause. They said that a recent, informal restriction by Uzbekistan, limiting pedestrians to carrying \$10 worth of goods across the border was also constraining movement and trade. Asked about their relations with Uzbek border officials, the Kyrgyz said that, again, the events of 2005 had made a huge difference. Previously, they had met regularly. Now, the Uzbeks were afraid that any contact with Kyrgyz officials would be punished by their superiors, so there was almost no contact.

¶11. (U) Visiting two schools, the Delegation was able to review the tremendous results of USAID projects aimed at teacher training and improving the quality of education. Members of a water association took advantage of the Delegation's visit to explain and demonstrate the revitalization of the irrigation system and the increases in productivity and incomes which have resulted from USAID assistance.

¶12. (U) DAS Krol has cleared this cable.
GFOELLER